

# National Foundation for American Policy

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## **New Research Finds 70 Percent of the Nation's Top High School Science Students Are the Children of Immigrants**

### ***Findings Demonstrate Additional Benefits of Employment and Family-Based Immigration***

**Arlington, Va.** – While only 12 percent of the U.S. population is foreign-born, 70 percent of the finalists in the 2011 Intel Science Talent Search competition were the children of immigrants, according to a new study by the National Foundation for American Policy, an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group. Only 12 of the 40 finalists at this year's competition of the nation's top high school science students had native-born parents.

The report can be found on the NFAP website at [www.nfap.com](http://www.nfap.com).

Stuart Anderson, NFAP's executive director and the author of the study, said he found many immigrant parents place a heavy emphasis on education, particularly in math and science, viewing this as a path to success in America. Anderson served as head of policy and counselor to the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service from August 2001 to January 2003. The research found, "An important implication of the study is that preventing the entry of H-1B visa holders, skilled immigrants and family-sponsored immigrants would shut off the flow of a key segment of America's next generation of scientists and engineers – the children of immigrants – because we would not have allowed in their parents." While former H-1B visa holders comprise less than 1 percent of the U.S. population, the study found 60 percent of the finalists had parents who entered the U.S. on H-1B visas, which are generally the only practical way to hire high skilled foreign nationals to work in the United States.

Three of the parents were sponsored through a family preference category; one received refugee status after applying for asylum. Eight of the children were themselves born outside the United States. Finalists' parents sponsored through a family preference category represented 7.5 percent of the total, about four times higher than their proportion in the U.S. population.

“The benefit America derives from the children of immigrants in science and math is an additional advantage the country reaps from being open to talent from around the world,” said Anderson. “Americans should take pride in our openness to individuals and their children who can succeed in the United States without regard to class or place of birth. Liberalizing our nation’s immigration laws will likely yield even greater rewards for America in the future.”

To conduct the research, Anderson interviewed both students and parents at the 2011 Intel Science Talent Search finals in March, in Washington, D.C., and later conducted follow up interviews as necessary. Previously known as the Westinghouse talent search or the “Junior Nobel Prize,” more than 95 percent of winners of the Intel Science Talent Search (STS) traditionally have pursued science as a career, with 70 percent earning Ph.D.s or M.D.s. Alumni of the competition “have made extraordinary contributions to science and hold more than 100 of the world’s most distinguished science and math honors, including 7 Nobel Prizes and four National Medals of Science.” More than 1,700 high school seniors entered the contest in 2011 by completing a detailed entry form. In addition, the student submits a research paper that documents his or her findings, including possible laboratory results. The project should display evidence of “research ability, scientific originality, and creative thinking.” The top 40 finalists gathered in Washington, D.C., in March 2011 for the last phase of the competition.

The study found the primary dividing line between the students at the 2011 Intel Science Talent Search was not intelligence or creativity but the immigration status of their parents. While all of the students were remarkable young people, 28 of the 40 finalists, or 70 percent, had parents who immigrated to America, compared to 12, or 30 percent, whose parents were born in the United States.

Skilled professionals hired in America on H-1B visas represent a surprisingly important source of outstanding children in science. Many of these parents first came to the United States as international students, then were hired on H-1B visas (or its precursor H-1) and were sponsored for permanent residence (a green card) by an employer. Generally good for 6 years, an H-1B temporary visa is often the only practical way to hire an international student graduating from a U.S. university or a professional or researcher from abroad.

According to the interviews, 24 of the 28 immigrant parents started working in the United States on H-1B visas and later received an employer-sponsored green card. Fourteen of those 24 were first international students. To appreciate how remarkable it is that twice as many of the students had parents who received H-1B visas as were native-born, consider that native-born Americans

comprise approximately 88 percent of the population and H-1B recipients (past and present) make up less than 1 percent of the U.S. population. In other words, even if twice as many of the 40 finalists had native-born parents as parents who had received an H-1B visa, rather than the other way around, it would still represent a significant finding of the added benefit provided to America by skilled foreign nationals.

China and India were the leading country of origins for the immigrant parents of the student finalists. Sixteen of the children had parents born in China, 10 had parents born in India, one student's parents were born in South Korea and another was born in Iran. As noted earlier, 12 of the student finalists had native-born parents. To place these numbers in perspective, in 2009, Indians comprised only 0.8 percent of the U.S. population and Chinese made up only 1 percent, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.

We can draw a number of conclusions from the finding that 70 percent of the finalists at the 2011 Intel Science Talent Search competition were the children of immigrants. First, we can observe that the immigrant parents placed a strong emphasis on education, particularly in math and science, viewing this as a path to success in America. Second, America can be proud that its society remains so open that individuals only a decade or two in the country can raise children poised to assume a leadership role in science and related competitive fields. Third, it is important to maintain open policies on international students, as many outstanding children of immigrants have parents who first entered the country as foreign students.

Finally, the study found, "The results should serve as a warning against new restrictions on legal immigration, both family and employment-based immigration, since such restrictions are likely to prevent many of the next generation of outstanding scientists and researchers from emerging in America." The talents possessed by these children of immigrants are a wonderful gift to America, a gift we can all benefit from in the future so long as we can allow talented foreign nationals to come to the United States and pursue their American dreams.

#### **About the National Foundation for American Policy**

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, former U.S. Senator and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and other prominent individuals. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at [www.nfap.com](http://www.nfap.com).

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